New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 2, 1951*

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK MIRROR

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"The King and I"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

March 30, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

They Do It Again

THE adventure of Anna Leonowens at the court of Siam in the early 1860s has been given the Rodgers and Hammerstein treatment in the charming musical play, "The King and I." This new show has everything that one has a right to expect from these talented collaborators, including a libretto that stands on its own merits, music that transposes emotion into melody and a handsome production stylized according to a half-civilized, half-barbarous Eastern court. With Gertrude Lawrence as prim glamor opposed to the lithe and bellowing authority of Yul Brynner as the king, there is fine contrast in the leading roles and a solid company around them. "The King and I" has not the masterpiece's brilliance, but it glows with its own softer lights of consistent entertainment.

* * *

This story of a governess's journey to a far and little known land, this intrusion of British learning and decorum into a society only sleepily aware of Western ways and still troubled with savage nightmares has all of the curious electricity that made it a hit as a book and as a movie under the title "Anna and the King of Siam." The Messrs. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II have chosen Anna's desire for a house of her own, the incident of the errant slave girl Tuptim, and the visit of Queen Victoria's envoy as the material through which they can best express this strange conflict of personalities. There are many incidental battles of wits between the King and Anna throughout the show, over both big and little matters, and within these Brynner manages to create a striking royal personality in an excellent performance. His impulsive but inquisitive, domineering yet pathetic monarch is the most vital element in the show, which almost always lets down a little when he is not on stage.

* * *

Rodgers' music has only a few echoes of the land of the pointed headpiece; it is Broadway theater music, of a uniformly superior quality. Its most radiant number is a catchy air called "Getting to Know You," sung by Miss Lawrence surrounded by her chorus of brown, coroneted pupils. There is a flash of red in Tuptim's impassioned soliloquy "My Lord and Master"; of pink in the waltz "Hello, Young Lovers!" (delivered by Anna) as a sentimental reminiscence; and of humor in the King's "Puzzlement" as he expresses some musical doubts of his own infallibility. Miss Lawrence sings her songs smoothly and maintains a stately, hoop-skirted demeanor in a role that is simply not as colorful as that of the prancing monarch.

* * *

John van Druten has directed the characters into the angled movements and fluid obeisances of the East, and one of his arrangements is a feature of the show. It is the introduction of the king's children to their future teacher, by the king himself, a pantomime of ceremony which includes many fine character touches in the silent reactions between the kids and their courtly father; and which is accompanied by music rising to the crescendo of the crown prince's entrance and then falling to the final entrance of the littlest one of all. Jerome Robbins' ballet is another striking interlude, a comedy imagination of what "Uncle Tom's Cabin" would look like in the traditional form of Siamese dancing. With Yuriko dancing the leading role of Eliza, this ballet entitled "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" puts a hilarious reverse twist on adapting Eastern fancies to American forms.

* * *

Among the added attractions of "The King and I" are Doretta Morrow, in pleasing voice as Tuptim, the slave girl who does not love the King; John Juliano as the wise, fierce Kralahome; Dorothy Sarnoff as the number one Queen; Johnny Stewart as the proud, young crown prince, and a host of children who go through their paces without conspicuous effort. Jo Mielzner's palace settings and Irene Sharaff's costumes combine to give the impression of an exotic and peculiar society. "The King and I" is a good story told and decorated with all the Rodgers and Hammerstein technical competence and intuitive showmanship, and blessed with the presence of Gertrude Lawrence and Yul Brynner. Broadway can pull out that ermine-edged carpet for another welcome for its most reliable contemporary musical artists.

"THE KING AND I"

Musical play based on the novel "Anna and the King of Siam" by Margaret Landon; music by Richard Rodgers; book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein 2d; staged by John van Druten; settings by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Irene Sharaff; choreography by Jerome Robbins; presented by Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein at the St. James Theatre, March 29, 1951. The cast:

Capt. Orton...Charles Francis
Louis Leonowens.....Sandy Kennedy
Anna Leonowens.....Gertrude Lawrence
The Interpreter.....Leonard Graves
The Kralahome....John Juliano
The King.....Yul Brynner
Phra Alack.....Len Mence
Tuptim.....Doretta Morrow
Lady Thiang....Dorothy Sarnoff
Prince Chulalongkorn....Johnny Stewart
Princess Ying Yaowalak..Baayork Lee
Lun Tha.....Larry Douglas
Sir Edward Ramsay.....Robin Craven

Journal American

March 30, 1951

Another Great Hit For Dick and Oscar

By JOHN McCLAIN

The boys have done it again. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d, creators of "Oklahoma!," "Carousel" and "South Pacific," last night presented their latest effort, "The King and I," at the St. James Theatre, and there is not the slightest doubt they have another big hit going for them.

Here they have Gertrude Lawrence returning to the musical comedy fold for the first time in a decade, and to celebrate the event they have given her the support of John van Druten's direction, settings by Jo Mielziner, incredible costumes by Irene Sharaff, dances by Jerome Robbins, and the solid assistance of Yul Brynner, as the King, and Dorothy Sarnoff and Doretta Morrow in the featured singing roles.

There also are a large number of apparently-Siamese children, each one cuter than the next. How can you miss?

Even the story, based upon Margaret Landon's novel, "Anna and the King of Siam" (which was later adapted into a notable movie) is both unconventional and exceptionally good box office.

You've got Miss Lawrence, playing the part of a prissy British school teacher, moving into the palace of the King of Siam to educate his 50-odd offspring.

With this premise it should require no crystal ball to predict that she will fall in love with the auburn sprouts and, through them, the dominant and truculent old man.

I guess the whole thing represents a gentle approach to the tragic inability of East getting together with West, although in this instance the principals must be credited with a near miss.

There has rarely been a better mounted show—the sets and costumes are superb—and there are these kids who begin creeping into your heart the minute you get to Siam, plus a ballet called "The Small House of Uncle Thomas," which is "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Siamese, and should rank with the great ones.

Miss Lawrence gave what I would regard as a thoroughly professional, though uninspired performance as Anna. It didn't quite seem that she was as carried away by the charm of the children and their prolific papa as she might have been.

On the other hand Mr. Brynner, the King, lent such strength and realism to his role that it became almost immediately acceptable that he should have a dozen wives, scores of children, and still appear attractive in the eyes of a conservative lady of Western extraction.

Dorothy Sarnoff was excellent as the King's principal wife and so was Doretta Morrow, a fugitive from "Where's Charley?," as the love interest in a sub-plot involving Larry Douglas, who sings well but has little else to do.

We now come to the matter of the music, and I feel obliged to say I think it is not a great score according to Richard Rodgers standards.

I realize it is a difficult chore to maintain a Siamese flavor throughout, keeping it popular the while, yet he was able to do a fine interpretive job with "South Pacific" and I had hoped for more here. I mean, there were no musical moments which made you almost jump out of the seat, knowing you were hearing a great hit for the first time, as there have been in most of his other successes.

Having thus put myself on the limb, I shall probably be dinned to death by selections from this show for the next six months.

And don't get me wrong—I love "Siam"!

The New York Times

March 30, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Nearly two years having elapsed since they invaded the South Pacific, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d have moved over to the Gulf of Siam. "The King and I," which opened at the St. James last evening, is their musical rendering of Margaret Landon's "Anna and the King of Siam." As a matter of record, it must be reported that "The King and I" is no match for "South Pacific," which is an inspired musical drama.

But there is plenty of room for memorable music-making in the more familiar categories. Strictly on its own terms, "The King and I" is an original and beautiful excursion into the rich splendors of the Far East, done with impeccable taste by two artists and brought to life with a warm, romantic score, idiomatic lyrics and some exquisite dancing.

* * *

As the English governess who comes out from England in the Eighteen-Sixties to teach the King's children, Gertrude Lawrence looks particularly ravishing in some gorgeous costumes and acts an imposing part with spirit and an edge of mischief. Yul Brynner plays the King with a kind of fierce austerity, drawn between pride of office and eagerness to learn about the truth of the modern world from a "scientific foreigner." Apart from the pleasures of the musical theatre, there is a theme in "The King and I, and, as usual, Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein have developed it with tenderness as well as relish, and with respect for the human beings involved.

Part of the delight of their fable derives from the wealth of beauty in the Siamese setting; and here Jo Mielziner, the Broadway magnifico, has drawn on the riches of the East; and Irene Sharaff has designed some of her most wonderful costumes. As a spectacle, "The King and I" is a distinguished work. In the direction, John van Druten has made something fine and touching in the elaborate scene that introduces the King's charming children to their English school marm. Jerome Robbins, serving as choreographer, has put together a stunning ballet that seasons the liquid formalism of Eastern dancing with some American humor. Yuriko, the ballerina, is superb as the Siamese notion of Elim in "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

* * *

Mr. Rodgers is in one of his most affable moods. For Miss Lawrence he has written several pleasant and ingratiating numbers which she sings brightly—"Hello, Young Lovers!" "The Royal Bangkok Academy" and "Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?" Dorothy Sarnoff does something wonderful with "Something Wonderful," which is one of Mr. Rodgers' most exultant numbers. Probably the most glorious number is "I Have Dreamed," which Doretta Morrow and Larry Douglas sing as a fervent duet. Mr. Brynner is no great shakes as a singer, but he makes his way safely through a couple of meditative songs written with an agreeable suggestion of Eastern music.

Say a word of thanks to Russell Bennett for his colorful orchestrations that make a fresh use of individual instruments and that always sound not only interesting but civilized. His orchestration should be especially appreciated in the long and enchanting scene that brings on the children one by one.

Don't expect another "South Pacific" nor an "Oklahoma!" This time Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein are not breaking any fresh trails. But they are accomplished artists of song and words in the theatre; and "The King and I", is a beautiful and lovable musical play.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

March 30, 1951

Long Reign on Broadway's Likely for 'The King and I'

R. & H. Wed Drama-Music

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

In one way or another you always expect novelty from Rodgers and Hammerstein. In "The King and I," they have achieved it once more, in a balance between drama and music which is quite different from their earlier efforts.

The story here is by now familiar to nearly everybody. The novel "Anna and the King of Siam" was based on true sources and became a striking moving picture a few years ago.

In the 1860s, a British widow went to Siam where she was hired as tutor to the King's children. Though they fought bitterly for the years of her stay there, she and the ruler grew to respect each other deeply. Anna became a diplomatic adviser to the King, as well as a lasting social influence on his country. Before she left she was to see the new King trending toward the merciful reforms she had urged.

The music acts on the story, in much the same way that Technicolor does to a moving picture. It is not so much an addition as it is an illumination of the play.

You lose sight of the struggle which should be the constant thread of narrative. Visual beauty is breath-taking to the point of becoming more interesting than the governess' stubborn efforts. The subplots are carefully restrained to illustrate the main theme, but an enchanting ballet in the second act is all out of proportion in entertainment value and length.

Delightful Scenes.

Once you accept the fact that this is a play with music rather than a musical, and adjust yourself to its remoteness, the high points of the story offer frequent enchantment.

The entrance of the royal children, and the schoolroom scene are utterly delightful. So, too, is the moment when Anna teaches the King to dance in Western style.

The ballet is offered as entertainment for visiting British who have called the King barbaric. He wants to show how progressive he has become under Anna's influence. The divertissement is a Siamese version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." True enough it makes flavorsome comment on the slavery Anna hates. But every enchanting moment of it makes the principal characters recede farther into the background.

Exquisite Colors.

"The King and I" is one of the loveliest things to watch I have ever seen. This is very largely due to the exquisite fabrics and soft colors used by Irene Sharaff in the costumes. Gertrude Lawrence wears several mammoth hoop skirts of lovely delicate shades, and the Siamese characters are costumed in endless variations of deeper, warmer colors.

Miss Lawrence, who has always been synonymous with glamour to me, disdains all her deft tricks and knowing enchantment, to play most simply as Anna. She is warm and human, and her natural humor keeps her from seeming to nag.

Many of the musical numbers take the form of asides or monologues in lyrical form. She has a lovely waltz, "Hello, Young Lovers," and a cunning ditty called "Getting to Know You." Throughout the show she sings with more tonal stability than she has in several recent appearances.

Yul Brynner is splendidly positive as the King. He is naive, childishly ruthless and imperial all at once.

Doretta Morrow is tender and sweetly tuneful as the slave girl sent from Burma as a gift to the King. It is her effort to escape with her lover that brings the play to its climax, when the King would whip her but lets his spirit crack before Anna's courage.

Dorothy Sarnoff is remarkably in character in appearance and movement as the head wife of the King, and handles her brief vocal opportunities with ease and effect.

The play is unusual and tender and something rare to see. I cannot help feeling that if it were to do complete pustice to its startling narrative, the outcome would have approximated a popular form of grand opera. As it is, remaining palatable for its intended public, it is often lovely, occasionally languid and stays fragrantly on the surface.

New York Post

March 30, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Another Triumph for the Masters

To get right down to it at once, "The King and I" is a beautiful and fascinating musical play, a splendid successor to the great "South Pacific." The eagerly anticipated new work by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2nd, which opened at the St. James Theater last night, has color, beauty, and a strange kind of sweetness, a good story, characteristically fine music and lyrics, a delightful ballet, some of the most charming children in the history of the stage, a remarkably believeable performance in the first half of the title role by Yul Brynner, and the magic of Gertrude Lawrence. In a word, it is a show of rare quality.

Unfairly but inevitably, everyone will want to know if it is as good as "South Pacific," and I will confess that I don't suppose it is. But what is? "South Pacific" merely happens to be the finest of all American musical plays. The important thing is that "The King and I," which, as the world is well aware, is based on a famous book about a Victorian English lady serving as a tutor to the innumerable progeny of a half-barbaric Siamese King, is a lovely and exciting achievement, of unusual taste and imagination, and a great and resounding credit to its distinguished authors and the American theater.

Some Moments

There are, for example, some scenes and moments that are not only remarkably exciting but also remarkably touching. The King's introduction of his vast brood of children to the new tutor, for one instance, is a memorably lovely episode, and so is a delightful scene of a geography lesson, in which Anna has some difficulty in convincing her pupils that there is such a thing as snow. It is curious how moving such seemingly simple moments can be. Then there is a delightful ballet presenting a Siamese conception of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and nothing could be much more enchanting than a scene in which Anna teaches the King to dance.

It would be easy to go on giving individual examples of the splendid professional excellence of the production, but, more than anything else, it is the perfect taste, the wonderful atmospheric rightness, the high romantic style, and the elusive air of sweetness, already alluded to, that combine to make "The King and I" an almost continuous joy. The score, I am forced to say, didn't make the immediate impression on me that the songs in "South Pacific" did, but it is none-the-less distinguished and impressive, and it will take a long time for anyone to get tired of "I Whistle a Happy Tune" and "Shall We Dance?," to name two numbers.

The Performances

The magic of Miss Lawrence is, of course, familiar to all playgoers, and she is a characteristic delight as the independent lady teacher. There is a fine portrayal of a tragic slave girl by the lovely Doretta Morrow, and the Oriental children, real or pretended, have the charm only Oriental children seem to possess. But there should be a special word for Mr. Brynner's notable characterization of the King, with his brilliantly persuasive combination of ruthlessness and goodness, of the longing to be a progressive and modern monarch at war with the instinctive leaning toward remaining a barbaric tyrant.

Never does Mr. Brynner fall into the facile way of being a dashing leading man putting on a superficial Oriental masquerade. To an amazing extent, he gets depth, honesty and complete credibility into an authentic characterization of a man whose awakening mind and emotion are at work. It is one of the year's fine acting jobs. The choreography of Jerome Robbins, the sets by Jo Mielziner, the costumes by Irene Sharaff and the staging by John van Druten have just the proper touch, and the combination of the idealized and the authentic in Far Eastern atmosphere is perfectly managed. Rodgers and Hammerstein have done it again.

DAILY NEWS

March 30, 1951

'The King and I' a Grand, Stunning And Boldly Different Musical Play

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d are men of distinction in the musical theatre, so it can be no news that their most recent collaborative work, "The King and I," is a distinguished musical play. It is another fine example of their faith in themselves. They have cut away from the usual music-show pattern once again and have achieved a very beautiful piece for the stage.

"The King and I" opened at the St. James Theatre last evening and as of this moment I have talked to nobody about it. But, just as sure as de Lawd of "Green Pastures" made little apples, the first time I do talk with somebody about it, somebody is going to ask, "Is it as good as 'South Pacific'? Or 'Oklahoma'? Or 'Carousel'?" And all I can answer is that there is no sense in asking for a comparison, for "The King and I" is something different.

It is beautifully set and sumptuously, stunningly, excitingly costumed. In it are some fine performances by Gertrude Lawrence, Yul Brynner, Doretta Morrow, Dorothy Sarnoff and many others. In it is an enchanting ballet created by Jerome Robbins. In it is some interesting music.

Story Comes First.

But the most important part of this big, long show is the work of Mr. Hammerstein as the librettist and lyrist. He has taken Margaret Landon's book, "Anna and the King of Siam," and has quite magically transferred it to the stage. It is an intricate and expert piece of showmaking in which the story comes first — and the fine sets, the glorious costumes, the splendid cast and the music are subordinate to this story.

In the tale the King of Siam is, of course, the King—back in the time of our country's Civil War. Anna is Anna Leonowens, an Englishwoman who has been imported to educate in Western culture the King's 67 children. Anna does this —and more; she manages to impart considerable education to the monarch himself, and he is a very tough, cocky and stubborn ruler.

Miss Lawrence is something dear and special as Anna, for she plays and sings with grace, intelligence and fine humor. Mr. Brynner is masterful as the King; his performance is one of extraordinary cunning and individuality. Miss Morrow, as a royal concubine who falls in love with a slave, is beautiful to see and to hear, and Larry Douglas sings well with her in a couple of rousing duets.

There are almost as many children in "The King and I" as there are at the fish fry in "Green Pastures," and they have some charming numbers. The two principal young men—Johnny Stewart as a Siamese prince and Sandy Kennedy as Anna's son—act and sing like the true troupers they are.

A Remarkable Ballet.

There is a great deal of story in this musical, so very few of the songs are songs in the Broadway sense. In lyrics and music their main job is story-telling—but Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein do occasionally bust loose with "I Whistle a Happy Tune" or "We Kiss in a Shadow" or "Shall We Dance?"

The visual highlight—and entertainment highlight—is a ballet representing the Siamese notion of how "Uncle Tom's Cabin" should be presented on a stage. It is a remarkable piece of work in which the dancers Yuriko and Michiko are outstanding, and in which the costuming by Irene Sharaff is notable. As a matter of truth, the costuming is notable from first to last in the show.

Jo Mielziner's sets are another representation of this fine artist's work and John van Druten's staging of the musical is most admirable. "Anna and the King of Siam" is a boldly and handsomely different kind of musical play.

Daily Mirror

March 30, 1951

'King and I' Has Heart, Comedy, Top Lyrics

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"The King and I," which opened here at the St. James Theatre last evening, is another extraordinary musical by the amazing team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. It has heart, drama, comedy and eye-filling spectacle. The Rodgers score has been fashioned to follow the action of the book rather than to shine forth in individual segments.

The lyrics are among the best ever penned by Hammerstein. They have something more to say than "I love you," something more to do than rhyme June with moon. They, along with the libretto, based on Margaret Landon's best-seller, "Anna and the King of Siam," offer a philosophy that is decent and enlightened.

As those of you who read the Landon book may recall, "The King and I" has to do with a resourceful Englishwoman who, back in the 1860's, went to Siam to teach the royal children. She did much for that backward country, though she had to fight valiantly with a stubborn monarch to do it. And one of the most important of her achievements was the schooling of the Crown Prince, who was, on his accession to the throne, to stand for progress.

John van Druten has staged "The King and I" skilfully, Jerome Robbins has choreographed atmospheric dances. One in particular, the story of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" told in terms of Siamese symbolism, is a delightful show-stopper. The sets by Jo Mielziner and costumes by Irene Sharaff are magnificent.

Rodgers and Hammerstein, doubling as producers of their own work, were inspired when they signed Gertrude Lawrence to play the all-important role of Anna. She invests it with charm, sentiment and emotional impact. It is a superlative performance by a great artist.

Yul Brynner's King is a fitting match for Miss Lawrence's Anna. It would be outstanding in even a straight play, much less one with music. Dorothy Sarnoff and Doretta Morrow are excellent in other roles. Salutes also are due Johnny Stewart, Charles Francis, Sandy Kennedy, John Juliano, Larry Douglas, Robin Craven and Baayork Lee.

"The King and I" sets a new high standard for the musical stage. We see no reason to compare it with Rodgers and Hammerstein's fabulous "South Pacific." It has merits that are all its own. It is an event not to be missed.

"The King and I" looms as another R. & H. smash hit. Lines of expectant playgoers have been filing by the St. James box-office for several days. If you hope to see it soon, take our advice and purchase the first available tickets. They're going to be difficult to come by.

There is so much more we should like to tell you about the wonderful new arrival, but an onrushing deadline prevents at this time. It is a lengthy show, with a late final curtain for critics working on a split-second schedule.

"L'Ecole des Femmes"

New York Post

March 19, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Jouvet in the French of Moliere

The local theater really took on an impressive international aspect last night, when the American National Theater and Academy presented at the ANTA Playhouse the eminent French actor, Louis Jouvet, in his production of Moliere's comedy, "L'Ecole des Femmes," which is still "The School for Wives" to me. The appearance of France's foremost player in a famous work by the greatest of French comic dramatists is undoubtedly a cultural event of considerable importance, and it deserves to be hailed with the warmest kind of respect.

Let me confess at once that I am not the best adviser you could conceivably have on a play acted in French. My gift for languages was never exactly excessive, and it has currently reached what is probably its nadir. And Moliere in the original tongue is not the easiest of going for a playgoer as limited in this respect as I am. It would be deceiving you to claim that "L'Ecole des Femmes" seemed to me a constant joy. But there is no doubt that M. Jouvet and his companions play it with wonderful zest and relish.

Comic Style

Even those of us who have seen the distinguished Frenchman only in movies know that he is an actor of rare skill. As the foolish old fellow who is trying to train a beautiful girl to become his dutiful wife, he is not afraid to make odd faces and indulge in extravagant antics when they are necessary, and, in a lesser man, it might be described as mugging. But M. Jouvet has an unescapable quality of comic theatrical style, and his playing of the silly Arnolphe is obviously that of a master of French classic comedy.

The supporting players are likewise experts in their field. I admit that I am not one who thinks that all French women are necessarily the pick of their sex, but the Jouvet company includes two actresses of rare charm, attractiveness, humor and talent. Dominique Blanchar, as the girl old Arnolphe is trying to train, is an exceptionally lovely young actress, who can be a romantic ingenue and manage sly comedy with equal success, and Monique Melinand, as a humorous serving girl, gives remarkable charm to what might have been just a slapstick part.

Reading French

I have, incidentally, a particular reason for being grateful to Mlle. Blanchar. She has a scene in which she reads aloud in a slow monotone from a book on the duties of a wife, and she does it with delightful skill. But what endeared her to me is that she did her reading in such careful and leisurely fashion that even I could understand a lot of what she was saying. I am eternally grateful to her. And, as for Mlle. Melinand, one of the many pleasant things about her is that I thought she rather resembled Marsha Hunt.

The setting and costumes by the brilliant Christian Berard, whose sets for "The Madwoman of Chaillot" are still remembered with pleasure, add greatly to the charm and color of the production. M. Jouvet not only acts the leading role but directed the play, and even we who are having our share of trouble with the Moliere French, can appreciate the vigor, inventiveness and style of the staging. If you have a proper knowledge of French, you shouldn't miss "L'Ecole des Femmes," and, if you are interested in the international theater, you should probably take a look at it, anyway.

"L'ECOLE DES FEMMES"
("THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES")

Comedy by Moliere presented in French; staged by Louis Jouvet; scenery by Christian Berard; produced by La Compagnie Dramatique Francaise des Tournees under auspices of the American National Theatre and Academy at the ANTA Playhouse, March 18, 1951. The cast:

Horace.....Jean Richard
Arnolphe.....Louis Jouvet
Chrysalde.....Leo Lapara
Alain.....Fernand-Rene
Georgette....Monique Melinand
Agnes.....Dominique Blanchar
Notary.....Michel Etcheverry
Notary's Clerk....Rene Besson
Enrique.....Georges Riquier
Oronte.....Pierre Renoir

Journal American

March 19, 1951

Fine Theatre But KNOW Your French

By JOHN McCLAIN

It is almost impossible to find anyone who makes any claim to literacy who will not admit, under pressure, that he is fairly familiar with the French language.

This springs from the fact that he was once obliged to conjugate a Gallic verb and, during his last trip to Paris, was able through a series of simple nouns and gestures to make himself well enough understood to stand off starvation.

"L'Ecole Des Femmes," the comedy by Moliere, which opened last night at the ANTA Playhouse with the great Louis Jouvet in the starring role, is no place for such linguists.

It is performed entirely in French, minus sub-titles, and unless you have a conversational familiarity with the tongue, you'd do just as well at home looking at television with the sound turned off. The French flies at you as though it were fired from a burp gun and nobody ever stops to say, "Comprende?"

Despite this, and relying only upon a synopsis which the management was kind enough to include in the program, Mons. Jouvet's gift for pantomime and inflection comes through with enormous impact.

* * *

Can Follow Action

Catching no more than one word in three you are still able to follow the action with fair fidelity, but you come away with a sense of having been cheated out of laughs which were so obviously enjoyed by the more erudite members of the audience.

The plot is much older than Moliere, who would be over 300 if still alive, but none-the-less highly operative even today. Jouvet, an old man of 42 (such being the life expectancy in those days) has reared a girl from childhood to be his ideal wife. Now, at 17, she is ready for the nuptials.

Leaving the house in which he has installed her on the eve of the wedding he encounters Jean Richard, the son of an old friend of his. The young man has no knowledge of the relationship between Jouvet and the young girl and quite frankly confides that he is hopelessly in love with her. In fact he even gets a loan from the older man to aid him in his courtship.

That's the simple situation: Jouvet knowing and doing his best to keep the younger man from beating his time. In the end it develops that the lad's father has already arranged a match for him with the mysterious daughter of another friend.

Lends Full Support

Jouvet sees this as a solution to his problem and lends full support. And who in the world do you suppose IS the daughter of the old friend? You guessed it—it's the same pretty girl, and the two young people are happily married with everybody's blessing.

Mons. Jouvet wheezes through his part as though the character were at least 97, walking in a bent and rickety manner, but entirely dominating the proceedings. There is no question of his superb gift of timing, no matter the tongue.

Jean Richard was pleasantly ebullient as the hero and Dominique Blanchar was at all times highly decorative and capable as the heroine.

Mons. Jouvet's direction was skillful, and Christian Berard conceived an ingenious set which could be moved about quite painlessly without requiring the lowering of the curtain.

It is a privilege and an honor to have these talented players in our midst. It is an adult and provocative evening, but you'd better know your French. But REALLY.

DAILY NEWS

March 19, 1951

Jouvet's French Company Gives Gay Performance of Moliere Play

By JOHN CHAPMAN

By way of celebrating International Theatre Month, Louis Jouvet, top man of the Parisian theatre, brought his company to the ANTA Playhouse last evening for a short engagement in Moliere's farce, "The School for Wives." It was a grand evening for francophiles and a good chance, too, for movie fans to see Jouvet in person. It also was a fine evening for Moliere, who, nearly 300 years ago, wrote he-and-she comedy at least as adroitly as does F. Hugh Herbert today. At the intermission last evening Tom Weatherly, strictly a Broadway man, said that "The School for Wives" struck him as a French "Springtime for Henry."

To anybody nurtured solely on the Anglo-American style of acting which is underplaying, Jouvet might seem a little rich in "L'Ecole des Femmes," for he mugs broadly, gesticulates extravagantly and catches flies continually whenever some other actor in his admirable troupe is forced by the script to say a few thousand words of verse. But according to the best historians this is the way Moliere should be played, for Moliere himself was a mountebank. Jouvet's performance is a vindication of Bobby Clark, our own comedian, who in 1946 made a hilarious romp out of another Moliere play, "The Would-Be Gentleman," and was scolded by some observers for taking liberties.

How to Raise a Dame.

"The School for Wives" is about an old goat (he is 42 in the script and Jouvet plays him as if he were 62, which is just about right according to modern life-expectancy tables) who has his own firm theory about marriage. To have a perfect wife, one should capture a female in infancy, rear her in strict seclusion and never allow her to learn anything. This the old goat has done—but he must have slipped somewhere. By the time she has reached 17 or 18 the captive female has somehow learned enough to fall in love with a young and attractive man.

It has been many years since I was a playgoer in Paris and I feared last evening that my ear for French would be hopelessly out of tune. No doubt it is—but so persuasive and so amiable were Jouvet and company that I was quickly at ease. A really good French actor can make you understand French even if you don't know this whimsical language.

Mlle. Blanchar Shines.

The captive female of "L'Ecole des Femmes" is Dominique Blanchar, a beautiful and gifted young comedienne. Her playing of the girl, who is seemingly vacuous but who has sense enough to fall truly in love, is admirable, and for me the high spot of the comedy is her reading of a set of maxims for marriage which Jouvet has provided for her.

There is another capital performance by Jean Richard as the eager young lover, and Fernand-Rene and Monique Melinande have a gay time clowning as a pair of servants. The setting, by the late Christian Berard, is attractive and mechanically ingenious.

The New York Times

March 19, 1951

Louis Jouvet and His French Company Act Moliere's 'L'Ecole des Femmes'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In honor of International Theatre Month, Louis Jouvet and his Téatre de l'Athénée company have had the goodness to come here from Paris for a limited engagement. They opened at the Anta Playhouse last evening in Moliére's "L'Ecole des Femmes," which they already have played in Europe, Egypt and South America. This is a good play for purposes of foreign travel, for it is reasonably intelligible to Americans who, like Chaucer's Prioresse, the French of Paris do unknowe.

For it is almost a masquerade as M. Jouvet plays it with a good deal of capering around the stage and grimacing. By the time Moliére wrote "L'Ecole des Femmes" in 1662, he had had a long training in commedia dell' arte in the provinces. M. Jouvet's stylized acting, which is directed frankly toward the audience, is in the commedia dell' arte tradition.

"L'Ecole des Femmes" is the fable of a fatuous man of middle years who proposes to escape the chief hazard of marriage by wedding a simple girl, Agnes, who has been brought up in ignorance of the world. Although he arranges the match sagaciously, he is defeated by love which comes between him and Agnes. She falls in love with a youth who is her own age.

It is a simple, symmetrical plot, with a pat solution that Molière would have to be censured for if he were not already revered in liberal arts colleges. He could be as bad as Shakespeare when he wanted to pull down the curtain and go home. But since Molière is a classic, he must not be criticized, especially overseas, and the student of French can sit happily in the Anta Playhouse, reassured by hearing the words femme, coeur and infidélité popping cheerfully out of the dialogue.

M. Jouvet has brought us a production that might be studied profitably by American scene designers or, more especially American producers, who are the ones who call the tune. Faced with the necessity of representing a street and the interior of a Parisian house, the late Christian Bérard solved it with audacious simplicity by bringing the end of a wall straight down to the footlights for the street scenes; and then dividing the wall into two mobile wings to frame a garden. Upstage rises the tower of a house with three miniature balconies.

* * *

This is a vivid set, reduced to the essentials and barely decorated; and it gives the actors both the room and the atmosphere for performing. The seventeenth-century costumes are also works of genius. Although they are beautiful, they are not stifled in splendor. Like the scenery, they are simple, sketched by a man who believed in basic design and instinctively dispensed with rich embellishment.

Although M. Jouvet plays Molière's satirical prank broadly, he, too, believes in design, as though the part of Arnolphe were a figure in a dance. The French are more animated conversationalists than the Anglo-Saxons. But M. Jouvet is animated even for a Frenchman. Arnolphe blows hot and cold according to the fortunes of the plot; and M. Jouvet follows him closely, walking with a crouch, moving his cane with elation or melancholy according to the mood of the scene, giggling, guffawing, or suffering, his mouth hanging open apprehensively and his eyes laughing or sorrowing as the case may be.

* * *

It is a remarkably busy performance—sometimes so for its own sake, that it is tiresome to watch. But, like the scenery, his acting is entirely new to America, where we are disposed to imitate reality. And it obviously comes out of a long tradition — out of commedia dell'arte, in fact, which is a style that needs a solid background of heritage and study.

For contrast, there is Dominique Blanchar as Agnes. She is an adorable young lady with a symmetrical beauty straight out of the story-books. She can also act, which does not always follow. And one of the funniest scenes in the play is her simple, childlike reading of the etiquette of marital duties for wives in the book Arnolphe hands to her. Mlle. Blanchar's colorless voice and her weary sense of obedience are wonderfully comic.

* * *

The cast also includes Jean Richard as the youthful suitor, Léo Lapara as the cynical counsellor, Fernand-René and Monique Melinand as the irreverent servants and Michel Etcheverry and Réne-Besson in a clownish scene as the notary and his clerk. Note, also, the bold make-ups of the actors in the comic parts; without being grotesque, they are humorously contrived.

"L'Ecole des Femmes" is a refreshing exercise in artificial acting by a master of the craft. For International Theatre Month, M. Jouvet has obligingly brought us the Molière tradition.

Daily Mirror

March 19, 1951

Jouvet in School for Wives Too Much for 1 Evening

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Since most of us are unable to slip away to Paris to see Louis Jouvet at the Theatre de l'Athenee, the American National Theatre and Academy has brought him to New York for a limited engagement. By way of celebrating International Theatre Month, Jouvet's company opened here last evening at the ANTA Playhouse in Moliere's "L'Ecole des Femmes."

There are those who hold that Jouvet is one of the greatest actors of our time. He is a versatile man, being not only actor, but manager and director as well. He has staged the Moliere comedy, and it is played by his own repertory group. A representative audience was present last night to welcome the distinguished visitors.

Jouvet, of course, acts the wealthy gentleman who adopts an orphan girl and rears her in seclusion to be an ideal wife for himself one day. He acts the role broadly, with extensive use of hands and arms and much rolling of his expressive eyes. Since he is an expert on Moliere, Jouvet's interpretation, we take it, is eminently correct. However, it is rather flamboyant for American audiences accustomed to a more restrained style.

Dominique Blanchar, as the ward who, upon reaching marriageable age, bestows her affections on a younger man, has a pleasing figure, an innocent face and a piping, childlike voice. She is quite easy on the eyes. Jean Richard is good as the young suitor who eventually wins her hand, and frustrates the schemes of her foster father.

There are also interesting characterizations by Leo Lapara, Fernand-Rene, Monique Melinand, Michel Etcheverry, Rene Besson, Georges Riquier and Pierre Renoir.

The settings and costumes by Christian Berard are magnificent. Against a towering blue backdrop, there rears a slender, balconied house with a triangular garden in front. This is surrounded by an ingeniously devised fence, which opens and closes to suggest changes of scene. High overhead are five huge, gilded candelabra with lighted candles.

"L'Ecole des Femmes" ("The School for Wives") is given in French, but an English synopsis and informative data on the production are provided in the program. Our French has become more than a little rusty with the years, and we had difficulty in following much of the dialogue. However, we found it fascinating to study the histrionic methods of Jouvet and his associates.

We suspect "L'Ecole des Femmes" will appeal primarily to students of the drama and acting, to those patrons of our more intimate movie houses offering French films. Personally, a full evening of even so gifted a star as Jouvet proved taxing for us. We would gladly have settled for a briefer view of him and his famous company.